

# Develop A Proposal

## Developing a Grant Proposal

Congressional offices are frequently asked for guidance by constituents planning projects of benefit to their community. With Federal funding cutbacks and competition for grants becoming more intense, proposals need to be carefully thought through to increase the likelihood of their getting funded. Sufficient time should be allowed for all stages of proposal development.

There are great differences in application and award procedures among grantmaking organizations. Federal agencies and large foundations may have formal application packets, strict guidelines, and fixed deadlines with which applicants must comply, while smaller foundations may operate more informally and provide a greater measure of assistance to inexperienced grantseekers. Nonetheless, all of those seeking grants need to go through certain steps in the grants process.

While money is the primary concern of most grantseekers, thought should be given to the kinds of nonmonetary contributions that may be available. In many instances, academic institutions, corporations, and other nonprofit groups in the community may be willing to contribute technical and professional assistance, equipment, or space to a worthy project. Not only will such contributions reduce the need for additional support, but evidence of such local support will be viewed favorably by most grantmaking organizations.

## PRELIMINARY PREPARATION

### Developing the Description of the Project

The first step in proposal planning is the development of a clear, concise description of the proposed project. In preparing this description, it is helpful to consider the project from the viewpoint of a potential funding source. The kinds of questions that program officers usually ask are:

- What are the needs this project is addressing?
- How serious are they?
- Whom will it benefit and how?
- What immediate and long range results are being sought?
- What methods are being proposed to achieve these results?
- Are there other projects currently in place or in the planning stage designed to meet these needs?
- How does this project differ?
- What is unique about it?
- How long will the project last?
- Is the timetable realistic?
- Can the proposed results be measured?
- Who will do the evaluation, and at what point?
- Are those making the proposal qualified to carry out the project?
- What are their credentials?
- Is there evidence of support from the beneficiaries of this project?
- Would there be community support?
- What other organizations are currently being approached for funding?
- Will the proposal attract additional financial support?
- What are the plans for the project at the end of the grant?
- How much is being asked for?
- What type of support is being asked for: construction funds, salaries, equipment, operating expenses?
- Is the figure realistic?

- Is the proposal consistent with the funding source's aims, resources, and geographic limitations?

## SEARCHING FOR FUNDING SOURCES

Once the project has been specifically defined, the grantseeker needs to research appropriate funding sources. It is not productive to send out proposals indiscriminately in the hope of attracting funding. Grantmaking organizations whose interests and intentions are consistent with those of the applicant are the most likely to provide support.

Many projects, in fact, can only be accomplished with funds coming from a combination of sources, among them Federal, State or local programs or grants from private or corporate foundations. In general, descriptions of government programs are published, along with application, award, and review requirements. Foundations usually do not make such announcements; they must be approached by those seeking grants.

### Where to look for Potential Funding Sources

#### Federal Funding

Detailed information about existing Federal programs can be found in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance and the Federal Register, available in many large libraries as well as in all Government depository libraries. Federal grants do not go directly to the final beneficiary, but are awarded to State or local agencies which, in turn, distribute the funds.

#### Foundation Funding

Detailed information about foundation funding can be found in The Foundation Center libraries.

### Doing Research on Likely Funding Sources

Once the names of potential funding sources have been identified, the grantseeker will want to know more about them. What kinds of projects have they funded in the past? Who have been the grant recipients?

Program listings in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance will sometimes include examples of federally funded programs and leads to related programs. Also listed are names, addresses, and telephone numbers of program officers.

There are many types of foundations: national, family, community, corporate, etc. As a general rule, it is a good idea not to start searching with large national foundations, but to start with funding sources close to home, which are frequently most concerned with solving local problems. Corporations, for example, tend to support projects in areas where they have offices or plants. Most foundations only provide grants to nonprofit organizations.

Extensive information about foundation and corporate giving can most often be found in annual reports. Some of these annual reports may be consulted in the collections of local Foundation Center cooperating libraries. In other cases, copies can be obtained directly. A study of these annual reports will give a good picture of funding philosophies and the types of support offered - for example, whether grants are for short-term, one-time only projects or for long-term, continuing projects.

At this point, grantseekers sometimes may wish to consult recipients of earlier grants for a more in-depth picture of the agency or foundation they are considering approaching.

## PREPARATION FOR WRITING THE PROPOSAL

The grantseeker, having identified potential funders, will want to approach the most likely prospects to confirm that they would indeed be interested in the project. Many Federal agencies and foundations are willing to provide an assessment of a preliminary one- or two-page concept paper before a formal proposal is prepared. The concept paper should give a brief description of the needs to be addressed, who is, to carry out the project, what is to be accomplished, how long it will

take, how the accomplishments will be measured, plans for the future, how much it will cost, and the ways this proposal relates to the mission of the funding source.

#### Developing

the concept paper is excellent preparation for writing the final proposal. As in developing the initial description of the project, the grantseeker should try to see it from the viewpoint of the grantmaking organization. The concept paper should be brief, clear, and interesting. Understand that from the funder's vantage point, the grant is not seen as the end of the process, but only as the midpoint. The funder will want to know what will happen to the project once the grant ends. For example, will it be self-supporting or will it be used as a demonstration to apply for further funding?

It

is a good idea to have the concept paper critically reviewed both by specialists in the field and by those unfamiliar with the project to insure that it is free of assumptions and jargon.

If

the funding source expresses interest in the concept paper, this is the time to ask for suggestions, criticism, and guidance before writing the final proposal.

## WRITING AN EFFECTIVE GRANT PROPOSAL

### OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

An

effective grant proposal has to make a compelling case. Not only must the idea be a good one, but so must the presentation. Here is a checklist of things to be considered:

All of the requirements of the funding source must be met: prescribed format, necessary inclusions, deadlines, etc;

- The proposal should have a clear, descriptive title;

- The proposal should be a cohesive whole, building logically, with one section leading to another; this is an especially important

consideration when several people have been involved in its preparation;

- Language

should be clear and concise, devoid of jargon; explanations should be offered for acronyms and terms which may be unfamiliar to someone outside the field;

- Each of

the parts of the proposal should provide as brief a narrative as possible, with supporting data relegated to an appendix.

- At

various stages in the proposal writing process, the proposal should be reviewed by a number of interested and disinterested parties. Each time it has been critiqued, it may be necessary to rethink the project and its presentation. While such revision is necessary to clarify the proposal, one of the dangers is that the original excitement of those making the proposal sometimes gets written out. Somehow, this must be conveyed in the final proposal. Make it interesting!

## PARTS OF THE PROPOSAL

### Cover Letter

#### The

cover letter should be written on the applicant's letterhead, and should be signed by the organization's highest official. It should be addressed to the individual at the funding source with whom the organization has dealt, and should refer to earlier discussions. While giving a brief outline of the needs addressed in the proposal, the cover letter should demonstrate a familiarity with the mission of the grantmaking organization and emphasize the ways in which this project contributes to these goals.

### Summary or Abstract

#### Although

the summary is placed as the first item in the proposal, it should not be written until the rest of the proposal has been developed. The summary should include a description of the applicant, a definition of the problem to be solved, a statement of the objectives to be achieved, an outline of the activities and procedures to be used to accomplish those objectives, a description of the evaluation design plans for the project at the end of the grant, and a statement of what it will cost the funding agency.

## Introduction

In the introduction, applicants describe their organization and demonstrate that they are qualified to carry out the proposed project. This section should give a brief history of the organization, its mission, and its significant accomplishments. It should tell about the qualifications of its professional staff and list its board of directors. Reference should be made to grants, endorsements, and press coverage the organization has already received. (Supporting documents can be included in the Appendix.) Applicants should indicate whether funds for other parts of the project are being sought elsewhere. Such evidence will, in fact, strengthen the proposal, demonstrating to the reviewing officer that all avenues of support have been thoroughly explored.

It is in the introduction that applicants make the point that they are a good investment. Statements made here should be carefully tailored to the funding source, pointing out that the overall goals and purposes of the applicant are consistent with those of the funding source.

## Problem Statement or Needs Assessment

This section lays out the reason for the proposal. It should provide well-documented evidence of a specific problem, explained from the beneficiaries' viewpoint. One of the pitfalls to be avoided is defining the problem as a lack of program or facility, i.e., giving one of the possible solutions to a problem as the problem itself. For example, the lack of a medical center in an economically depressed area is not the problem -- the problem is that poor people in the area have health needs that are not currently being addressed. The problem described should be of reasonable dimensions, with the targeted population and geographic area clearly defined. It should include a retrospective view of the situation, describing past efforts to ameliorate it, and projections for the future. The problem statement, developed with input from the beneficiaries, must be supported by statistics and statements from authorities in the field. The case must be made that the applicant, because of its history, demonstrable skills, and past accomplishments is the right organization to solve the problem.

## Objectives

Once

the needs have been described, proposed solutions have to be set forth, wherever possible in numerical terms. The population to be served, time frame of the project, and specific outcomes must be defined. These measurable objectives form the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program. It is important not to confuse objectives with methods toward those ends. For example, the objective should not be stated as "building a prenatal clinic in Adams County," but as "reducing the infant mortality rate in Adams County to X percent by a specific date."

## Methods or Procedures

Just

as the statement of objectives builds on the problem statement, the description of methods or procedures builds on the statement of objectives. For each objective, a specific plan of action should be laid out. It should delineate a sequence of justifiable activities, indicating the proposed staffing and timetable for each task. This section should be carefully reviewed to make sure that what is being proposed is realistic in terms of the applicant's resources and time frame.

## Evaluation

An

evaluation plan should be a consideration at every stage of the proposal's development. Data collected for the problem statement form a comparative basis for determining whether measurable objectives are indeed being met and whether proposed methods are accomplishing these ends, or whether different parts of the plan need to be fine-tuned to be made more effective.

Among

the considerations will be whether evaluation will be done by the organization itself or by outside experts. The organization will have to decide whether outside experts have the standing in the field and the degree of objectivity that would justify the added expense, or whether the job could be done with sufficient expertise by its own staff, without taking too much time away from the project itself.

## Methods

of measurement, whether standardized tests, interviews, questionnaires, observation, etc., will depend upon the nature and scope of the project. Procedures and schedules for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data will need to be spelled out.



## Future Funding

The last narrative part of the proposal explains what will happen to the program once this grant ends. It should describe any prior commitments of support for a successful demonstration project. It should outline all other contemplated fund-raising efforts and future plans for applying for additional grants. Projections for operating and maintaining facilities and equipment should also be given.

This is the place to indicate whether any income will be generated by the project, either in the form of service-based fees or salable products.

## Budget

While the degree of specificity of any budget will vary depending upon the nature of the project and the requirements of the funding source, a complete, well thought out budget serves to reinforce the applicant's credibility, and to increase the likelihood of the proposal's being funded. The estimated expenses in the budget should build upon the justifications given in the narrative section of the proposal. A well prepared budget should be reasonable and demonstrate that the funds being asked for will be used wisely.

The budget should be as concrete and specific as possible in its estimates. Every effort should be made to be realistic, to estimate costs accurately, and not to underestimate staff time.

The budget format should be as clear as possible. It should begin with a Budget Summary, which, like the Proposal Summary, is only written after the entire budget has been prepared. Each section of the budget should be in outline form, listing line items under major headings and subdivisions. Each of the major components should be subtotaled with a grand total placed at the end. If the funding source provides forms, most of these elements can simply be filled into the appropriate spaces.

Generally,

budgets are divided into two categories: Personnel costs and non-personnel costs. The personnel section usually includes a breakdown of salaries (including increases in multiyear projects), such fringe benefits, as health insurance and Social Security, and consultant and contract services. The items in the non-personnel section will vary widely, but may include: space costs, utilities, purchase or rental of equipment, training to use new equipment, photocopying, office supplies, postage, insurance, travel, etc.

For each item there should be two columns, headed "Requested" and "Donated." The "Requested" column lists those amounts which the funding source is being asked to provide. The "Donated" column represents amounts coming from elsewhere, anticipated earned income, and services or equipment which are being contributed to the project.

Before the budget is put into final form, it should be reviewed for cost effectiveness. It may be necessary to go back to the narrative to explain any seemingly high costs.

## Appendix

Lengthy documents which are referred to in the narrative are best added to the proposal in the Appendix. Examples include letters of endorsement, partial list of previous funders, key staff resumes, annual reports, statistical data, maps, pictorial material, and newspaper and magazine articles about the organization. Nonprofit organizations should include an IRS 501(c)(3) Letter of Tax Exempt Status.

## Grant Resources